



Collected Stories

Willa Cather

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The most complete collection available of Willa Cather's remarkable short fiction, *Collected Stories* brings together all the stories published in book form during her lifetime along with two additional volumes compiled after her death.

These nineteen stories resonate with all the great themes that Cather staked out like tracts of fertile land: the plight of people hungry for beauty in a country that has no room for it; the mysterious arc of human lives; and the ways the American frontier transformed the strangers who came to it, turning them imperceptibly into Americans. In these fictions, Cather displays her vast moral vision, her unerring sense of place, and her ability to find the one detail or episode that makes a closed life open wide in a single exhilarating moment.

Collected Stories Details

Date : Published December 1st 1992 by Vintage (first published June 1970)

ISBN : 9780679736486

Author : Willa Cather

Format : Paperback 512 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Classics, Literature, American

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From Reader Review Collected Stories for online ebook

Catherine Richmond says

As a Virginian who moved to Nebraska, I ought to like Willa Cather. And I try. In fact, in spite of my compulsive tendency to finish what I start, it took two tries to slog through this. I'm sorry, but reading should not be drudgery.

Joy says

Novellas, part of Tom's book collection. She's really a magnificent writer. Learned a lot in her bio.

Jeff says

As my previous reviews have made clear I am a very big fan of the work of Willa Cather. Some of her novels are among the best works of American writing of the twentieth century.

This collection of short stories brings together all those that she chose to publish in book form. While there are numerable other short pieces of hers these were those that she chose to publish in primary form.

Not all of them work for me. The earlier writings, especially those from the initial collection " The Troll Garden " were not her best writing and the subject matter did not, in my opinion play to her natural strengths.

" Flavia and Her Artists " from this set works fairly well though it also is easy to abandon early for its flaws. A woman who fashions herself as being one who, in her small, town holds a salon of ideas of sorts becomes the subject of ridicule to many of her boarders and even community members when a celebrated artist who has stayed with her paints a very unflattering caricature of her in a widely read newspaper article. Her husband, without displaying why, upbraids him in such a way at that evenings dinner that the artist and many of the other visitors all take the road the next morning. Flavia, who has been protected from the offending article by her husband and household staff, is very disappointed with her husband. Claiming his inability to appreciate art and the artistic temperament she settles all the blame for the disturbance on her husband. He demonstrates his love by letting the vitriol fall on him without response so as to protect his wife from the hurtful words of others.

" The Garden Lodge " is another iffy story. We meet Caroline, a strong young woman who took possession of her Father's household at a fairly young age after her Mother's death. Eventually she a man a decade or more her elder and he has brought her a level of material comfort. She is known for her serious main, no foolishness resides in her. Still she has the love of the arts. When a famous musician visits she feels a connection to him never felt before. She acts not on it but after he leaves she visits the small guest house he had stayed in to feel his presence. When her husband offers to convert that same building for a special use of hers she tells him no. In her mind she cannot let go of the space that " he " had physically occupied. She spends a terrible night of dreams until in the morning as if she has come thru a storm of potential disaster and tells her husband she would live for him to make the changes to the building. The storm of the visiting artist has passed.

From her second collection of stories, titled " Youth and the Bright Medusa " we read a long piece called " Coming Aphrodite. " This is an excellent piece. We meet a man named Hedger, a young artist living in the city in a small, unkempt flat, in a ratty building in a busy immigrant filled neighborhood. He is happy, however, living simply and spending his time working on his craft of painting. As the story begins a young woman is moving into the apartment next to his. Before he meets her his opinion is not good, she leaves a large massive trunk in the hallway for days. Eventually, they meet, and after seeing each other out and about develop a friendship. A trip to Coney Island displays both her incredible spontaneity as well as how easy it would be to be both enthralled and frustrated by her. She is working toward becoming an actress, taking classes and training in voice and acting and all else that entails. One day she is excited to offer Hedger that she has met a well known painter who has offered to see his work, and, perhaps to feature it to help him get started. Expecting gratitude from her new love, wanting to please him, she is shocked by his diffidence if not outright hostility to the idea. He considers the man a poor painter, a hack, he is all about the art, and the truth. She sees his paintings piling up in his apartment unseen and, stung by his response, comments that what good is a great painting if no one sees it. As true as that may be he takes offense and storms off. Five days later, chagrined, after spending time in the country with a friend, he returns to apologize. She has left, he finds later just a few hours earlier for Paris. He knew it had been planned but is devastated just the same. The story shifts to decades later. The young actress, Eden Bower, is now world famous and is in town to appear in her latest play " Coming Aphrodite. " Traveling the old familiar places she inquires about her old friend, in an art shop she asks if his work ever became known. She learns that he is well known, to other painters. Not as successful commercially as he might be he still is the painter's painter and is revered by a group of young up and comings. She regrets their parting but is glad he met with the success he most valued as well.

Another piece from that collection is called " The Diamond Mine." It becomes fast evident that in this period of her writing Cather was fascinated in the interplay between the artist and his fans or those with whom he interacted. The sacrifices to relationships that might become necessary. One could wonder what she had to sacrifice. In this story we meet Cressida Garrett a quite successful singer. While not technically the best singer she is very popular, always tailoring her performance to what is desired of her. The story is narrated by a young woman who has moved in Cressida's orbit and is well familiar with her life. Cressida has been married three times. She had a tendency to love too easily and to be hurt by the general rapacity of people. Her family treated her as a leech treads a blood vessel. She has a posse of hangers on long before the terms were well known. They don't care for her. From her brother and sister to her son she is a meal ticket. All in all this is a sad story but yet we do learn a good bit about Cressida and don't envy her the success she has found as she has paid a high cost.

" A Gold Slipper " tells of a well to do businessman, one a little ego filled over his success who has found he is expected by his wife to accompany her to a new performance by a well known singer. He wishes not to go and, once forced, is doubly dissatisfied to find their seats are on the back of the stage. He scowls through the performance, embarrassed to be in exhibit so. Finally, when the show is over he sends his wife and her friend home in a carriage as he must catch a train for a business meeting after having a drink. It is a stormy night and as his cab is departing he is accosted by a woman who ends up being the very performer he had just seen as assistant. They must get to the train station and their cab has become of ill repair. Along the way she reminds him of the show, his expression, his obvious distaste. He is flustered, always confident he finds this beautiful woman who has strong opinions of her own beyond his understanding. He also finds her blushing attractive. She invites him to visit with her in her car on the train and they have a long, argumentative discussion. Nothing untoward happens, but he will remember that evening long in his life with that scandalous actress he so disliked at the start of the evening.

The other stories in this second collection of hers featured little merit for me. That is, with the exception of Paul's Case which I had read quite some time ago. In this story Paul is a dissolute youth of a hundred years

ago. Failing in school, put to work by his Father he runs from that attempt at positive influence by stealing money from his family and heading to New York City. There he lives as he feels, undeservedly, he should. Fine hotels, fine foods, fine clothes. When word comes his Father has found his location and is on the way he cannot face returning to the dullness of his former life.

The next collection featured in this composite is titled " Obscure Destinies " and begins with a wonderful story entitled " Neighbor Rosicky. " Rosicky is a hard working, fairly prosperous farmer on the plains. As the story begins he is in his Doctor's office being told that his heart is failing. If he will limit his activities, let his boys do the labor of the farm, change his diet a bit, he is told he might live quite a few more years. The Doctor especially likes this patient and thinks of his visits on the farm, the special warmth and happiness of the home. And Rosicky does listen to the Doctor, as best he can. His family is made up of several strapping sons and a young daughter who he especially reveres. Over the course of the story we learn about Rosicky's youth. Moving from Eastern Europe to London and finally, through his good character gaining an opportunity to move to America. Even then it took him time to get West and have what he never envisioned, land and a farm of his own. Rosicky wonders if it is the long journey, and a bit older age at which his family came, that allows him to enjoy his children more. To live more in the moment. His older son, Rudy, has married a city girl and she is struggling with the country life. Rosicky is sympathetic to her adjustment, more than journalists might expect, more than his own son. When his heart begins to fail it is his daughter in law who is within him and Polly performs in an admirable way. This is just a sweet story.

Interestingly the following story, " Old Mrs Harris " is a similar story told from the female perspective. Mrs. Harris is an elderly woman who lives with her daughter, son in law, and grandchildren. As with Rosicky her grandchildren love and adore her. She does not have the same material comforts, she has a small curtained off section of a room as her private space, and in the tradition of her home country it is the grandmother who, in such a family unit, still does much of the work of the house. A neighbor lady, a Jewish woman named Mrs Rosen visits often and though she does not understand the working arrangement of the family, indeed she thinks the youthful daughter is taking advantage of the old woman, she does respect Mrs. Harris a great deal. In both these stories we see elderly immigrants who seem to want to give their descendants a bit more frivolity in their lives than they themselves were granted, this is not an attribute often demonstrated in writing of these characters. Cather seemed to have a real ability to write the immigrant experience. Another fine, sweet story.

Two Friends in another fine story. More a demonstration of a time and place, a reading of what it might be like to have grown up in that time frame. A woman narrates the story remembering her girlhood and how she looked up to two of the leading men of the community, Misters Trueman and Dillon. Two men, very different in ways and opinions, who despite these differences had a strong friendship that had them end each day together having long discussions as the days came to an end. Discussions that the young girl often lingered around, eavesdropped, and occasionally was granted entry into. The friendship ends with the nomination of William Jennings Bryan and the total embrace of him by Dillon while Trueman considers him and his policies undeserving of embrace by an intelligent man. In a couple of these stories Cather gives us a glimpse of the thunderbolt that Bryan provoked across the plains states with his silver revolt.

The next subset of stories come from the collection " The Old Beauty and Others." The title story is another very strong entry. It opens with a mid fifties American gentlemen named Seabury visiting in France. Not in Paris but in a town of resort nature but in the years after the first war a bit downtrodden. For a day or two he spies an elderly woman in his hotel who provokes a memory he cannot place but her French name offers no stimulus to how he knows her. Eventually he does find out who she is, a famed society maven from an earlier time named Lady Longstreet. We are given a full picture of her story, her life of privilege in the late nineteenth century and how the modern world had been a hard mistress of her later years. Seabury himself

had known the great lady as a quite young man in New York City and he and she rejoin their relationship. The story begins and ends with the Lady Longstreet's death but still qualifies as one that makes one both feel good, and bad, in alternating breaths.

If you have ever been one like me who wonders what it might have been like to grow up, to live in the past the story " The Best Years " will hit your heart. Set in very end of the nineteenth century the story is primarily of a young woman, a girl really, named Lesley Fergusson, living in the Plains as the eldest daughter in a very loving, close knit family. We are introduced to her by, and after meeting, Evangeline Knightly, a Superintendent of several schools in Southeast Nebraska who is making her rounds to her schools. She has a special place in heart for her youngest teacher Lesley, who we find she actually had fudged the rules to let her take her first school, at the young age of fourteen as she did so well on the exams and seemed such an upright girl. On this visit she arranges to take the homesick teacher home that Friday afternoon and return her Monday in time for class. It is out of her way but, again she loves the girl. We watch her with her family over the weekend. Her brother Hector, close to her in age and her great bosom friend. Her ten year old twin brothers and the youngest sibling a six year old boy. The closeness of this family will make you want to paint yourself into the picture. Again, Cather, paints a picture of a plains family full of love and a moderate success but also one that for one reason or another has chosen to live more in the moment and not strive for the overwhelming more, more, more, of potential greater success. I would wonder if this is from her own positive experience of a like nature or a possible rebuke of that ever striving, failure to stop and smell the roses lifestyle of the highly driven. In any case this story is very good and when the denouement of young Lesley occurs, told to us in an unexpected, almost offhanded way, it is like a gut punch. A great piece of writing.

From her last collection, the posthumously published " Five Stories " we only get two. (the others are duplicated in earlier works) " Tom Outland's Story " is a solid story telling of two young men who working on a ranch become enchanted with a large Mesa Bluff that has many legends told of it. Eventually they explore this and find a discovery of a well preserved Indian society of cave dwellers. Both picture this discovery being hailed as a treasure and when they find the government indifferent their dissimilar reactions to it causes a break which is not repairable.

The other story featured from this collection is another of those that for certain folks will be one they would like to insert themselves into. We meet a group of young boys, ranging in age from ten to their late teens. Living in a small prairie town called Sandtown they are great friends and share days and nights in the times between chores and school. On this night they are spending one of the last fall nights camping on an island in the middle of the river that sluices through town. The boys fish, and then as the darkness settle in set up their fire and tell stories and speak of dreams of the future. Each boy is described well, each has their own dream. One boy Tip describes a mesa in New Mexico his Uncle has told him about. One that it has been found impossible to reach the summit as the sides are sheer cliff. The boys come up with a plan to later visit it and conquer it's heights, something it is known that Indians long ago did. It has to be noted that this Mesa, this geographical marking might well be the mesa described in Tom's story above. Later we learn what happened to the boys as they grow up. We are not surprised to learn they never made it to that fabled Mesa in New Mexico. I, myself, remember campfires, sleep outs with the great friends of my youth. I'm not sure we ever experience such an innocent non transactional friendship ever again in our lifetimes as we do then. Reading this story I would like one last campfire to set around with the companions of my youth.

It should be noted that I have not noted some stories in this story that failed to move me to produce comment on. These include

The Marriage of Phaedra

Scandal
A Death in the Desert
A Wagner Matinee
The Sculptor's Funeral

And

Before Breakfast.

Even so the worthy stories make up for these. Cather at her best is very special.

Alec Sieber says

Cather is a stolid writer, not given to stylistic excitements or other potential lapses in formality. We have here, then, a solid set of steady stories. While these stories may nominally address such heady themes as coming to terms with death, or the humble nobility of the immigrant experience, their true purpose lies in the quiet unearthing of subtle moments of character, silent reveals of minor fate or destiny. At Cather's best, as in "Tom Outland's Story" or "Coming, Aphrodite", the accrual of careful, exact detail can reveal a glimpse of the vast sublime. At her most uninteresting, her obsession with the subtle tacks of social and family life remains just as dull as one would expect.

Frederick says

I won't give this stars because I've only read two stories by Willa Cather. But those stories were great. One is called "Paul's Case." It's been said Paul is a precursor to Holden Caulfield. It is a story waiting for a movie adaptation. (Nobody's ever filmed *CATCHER IN THE RYE*, either. Salinger won't let 'em. Good for him. He's showing us the power of books. His book stands entirely on its own.) I have forgotten the title of the other story I'm thinking of, but it involves the funeral of somebody the main character knew long before. It is written with economy and stoicism.

R says

Unbelievably hackneyed writing from one of my favorite authors. Such a shame. Stick to her novels. You can definitely pass on her short stories. The writing is so clunky. Almost every story starts with a character's name and action in the first sentence.

fake example

Charles Dixon was running terribly late because the train he was on, a local coming to the city from the coast, was forced to make numerous stops, and at one stop, a woman named Margaret Barnett (from Pittsburgh) got on and sat across from him, and kept her hands in her lap while obsessively opening and closing her book.

Try reading that 19 times. Yes, it's that repetitive and bad!

Julie says

Nathan's pick, Paul's Case by Willa Cather

Daniel Edward St-Jean says

Overall, a satisfying and integral read for any writer or prose.

Recommended.

Penny says

I know, most people rate her as good-but-not-quite-great, but some of these stories are just luminous. . . .or they capture a sense of time and place so well -- Neighbor Rosicky, for example.

Satia says

My appreciation for Cather grew with each story. For my full review, please visit my blog.

Lisa says

Having read "My Antonia," I thought I would enjoy this collection of Willa Cather's short stories. I did enjoy some of them, but other stories in the anthology were difficult to stay involved in. Oddly, her longer short stories which were more like novellas were more enjoyable for me. She had a wonderful way of portraying a certain type of person, one not typical of mainstream Americana. Her pictures of immigrants striving to survive on the prairies are wonderful. Even reading them from another time period, the characterizations were full and the people easy to relate to. Other stories, however, did not hold my attention.

Jessica says

Gosh, turns out I totally hate Willa Cather. Who knew?

Danelle says

(This is a long, long review. You've been warned.)

A collection of 19 short stories previously published in other collections, books, and magazines with the added notes on an unfinished work that Cather had destroyed after her death, it's an excellent collection of her works.

The first section contains 3 stories from The Troll Garden.

1. Flavia and Her Artists

Imogene visits her friend Flavia at her place, which is filled with "artists". Her visit with the artists does not go as it's expected to.

He had possessed for her that almost hypnotic influence which young men sometimes exert upon little girls. It was a sort of phantom love affair, subjective and fanciful, a precocity of instinct, like that tender and maternal concern which some little girls feel for their dolls. Yet this childish infatuation is capable of all the depressions and exaltations of love itself; it has its bitter jealousies, cruel disappointments, its exacting caprices.

2. The Garden Lodge

Caroline Noble lives with her wealthy husband in a large house by the sea. Caroline grew up extremely poor - her father an irascible composer who never paid his bills. When both her brother and mother die, she begins giving piano lessons to get out of debt. She then begins to actually make something of herself.

One summer, her husband Howard, invites a young tenor to their garden lodge and Caroline (who could've been a concert pianist) accompanies him. He reawakens her passion for music and when he leaves she continues to hang about the garden lodge to recapture the feelings while she worked with him.

Her husband innocently suggests they tear down the garden lodge and build a summer house. She declines - but then spends a stormy night in the lodge and has a change of heart.

3. The Marriage of Phaedra

A man named MacMaster sets out to a late painter's studio to gather information for a biography he is writing. He meets James, the painter's "man", and begins visiting the studio daily, becoming friends with James and garnering much information on the painter's life and works.

One work in particular draws him - The Marriage of Phaedra; it is unfinished and holds a place of reverence for both MacMaster and James...

The next 8 stories are from Youth and the Bright Medusa:

4. Coming Aphrodite!

An unknown painter named Don Hedger rents a room in a Washington Square house. A new neighbor, Eden

Bower, moves in and confronts him about bathing his bulldog in the communal bathtub. Don is drawn to her and one day discovers a hole in the wall between their rooms. He begins to spy on her as she exercises (yoga? calisthenics?). They become close - spending more and more time together. One day, she suggests a well-known painter help Don and he gets angry and leaves. He returns to Long Island days later, realizing how ridiculous he's been, only to find she's gone.

An interesting story showing two very different ways of viewing success.

They did not talk at all, but when they went over the gangplank she took his arm and kept her shoulder close to his. He felt as if they were enveloped in a highly charged atmosphere, an invisible network of subtle, almost painful sensibility. they had somehow taken hold of each other.

5. The Diamond Mine

A successful singer provides everything for her haughty family. (One wonders - did Cather experience this?)

"I've had to try too hard for people who wouldn't try at all."

They regarded her as a natural source of wealth; a copper vein, a diamond mine.

6. A Gold Slipper

Marshall McKann is dragged to the music hall by his wife and her friend for a concert. He is bored and the singer notices. Later, as he's headed to the train station to get out of town, he and the singer end up travelling together. After talking most of the night, she plays a trick on him.

(Oh my gosh - "a highbrow from Sewickley" - ha! Cather, some things never change!)

...with weighty opinions, and a deep voice like a jovial bassoon.

It does not matter much whom we live with in this world, but it matters a great deal whom we dream of.

7. Scandal

Kitty Ayreshire, an opera singer, has been confined to her place for weeks with a cold. Her friend visits her and they discuss the gossip that is circulating re: Kitty and her absences - especially that of a wealthy and well-known clothing manufacturer who has been galavanting around town with a Kitty look-alike.

8. Paul's Case

Paul, a Pittsburgher who despises his circumstances (poor, working class, motherless) has just been suspended from school. He really could care less though as what he truly helps him survive is his job as an usher at Carnegie Music Hall. Here Paul feels he belongs amongst the money, the glamour, the music, the artists; here is all the beauty he is lacking in his real life.

When Paul gets in trouble at school again (he's pretty much a pathological liar) he's removed from school and forbidden to work at the music hall or associate with any of his theatre friends. While at his new job, he takes the deposits to the bank, but pockets \$1000. He uses this to get away from his hated Cordelia Street. He heads to New York, where he lives as he's always wished to. Then, he's in the news; his father is coming to

get him and he's out of money. Paul is just not able to come to terms with returning to Pittsburgh.

9. A Wagner Matinee

Clark, a young man in Boston, receives his aunt, who is visiting the city for the first time in 30 years. Aunt Georgianna is responsible for Clark's being in Boston as she introduced him to music, Latin, Shakespeare, mythology, etc. She got him off the farm and out of his small Nebraska village.

To repay his aunt for her kindness, he takes her to a symphony. She is mesmerized and doesn't want it to end.

10. The Sculptor's Funeral

A famed sculptor's body is brought back to his small town after his death. His student accompanies the body for the journey from "back East" and is visibly distraught at the loss of the renowned artist.

The sculptor's friend, the town lawyer, is the only person who is upset at the loss of Harvey Merrick. The other townsmen make fun of the sculptor and his education. Laird, the lawyer, calls them out on their hypocrisy, as Merrick was the only one to get out of the small town and make a name for himself.

11. A Death in the Desert

Everett is travelling by train to Cheyenne, Wyoming when he is mistaken for his brother, a musical prodigy. It's often the case and he's not surprised though he does tire of it. In Cheyenne he is recognized by one of his brother's contemporaries. She is dying and Everett spends her last weeks with her.

The next 3 stories are from *Obscure Destinies*

12. Neighbor Rosicky

A Czech immigrant farms in Nebraska with his wife and 6 children. He worries that his children (his oldest son and his wife in particular) will leave the country and farming to live in the city. He believes in living a life you enjoy and can only see that happening when you own your own land in the country.

The country doctor tells him he has a bad heart and to take it easy - no more strenuous farm work. Rosicky begins doing more around the house (carpentry, tailoring) and this in turn gives him more time for introspection. He hopes his children never know the hardships he once knew.

What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the world without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings.

It was as if Rosicky had a special gift for loving people, something like an ear for music or an eye for color.

13. Old Mrs. Harris

A story mainly focusing on the three generations of women in a family. We have the grandmother, a daughter (a displaced Southern belle), and the granddaughter (a girl hoping to go to college at the University of Michigan). They live in a too-small house with too many children and not enough of anything.

*It's said this story is semi-autobiographical.

14. Two Friends

Mr. Dillon and Mr. Trueman are two friends in a small western town. They are the most prominent and wealthy citizens. Mr. Dillon attends the 1896 Democratic Convention where he hears Bryan speak and becomes a devoted follower. Mr. Trueman thinks Dillon has lost his mind and waits for him to "come to his senses." When he doesn't, their friendship suffers and comes to an abrupt end.

The little, unsuccessful men were pleased, as they always are at the destruction of anything strong and fine.

The next 3 stories are from *The Old Beauty*:

15. The Old Beauty

Henry Seabury, after a prosperous stint in the Orient, has returned to Post World War I France. He chooses a place to stay that he feels is "as it used to be." While there, he meets a woman he knew before he went abroad, a tragic figure with whom he had an uncomfortable encounter with once.

*Lots of stress on the women in this story as the "women now days" - we see the pioneer values fading away and the focus on the increasing materialism.

16. The Best Years

The story of a school superintendent and the small country schools she is responsible for - with one in particular.

*The last thing Cather ever wrote, you can see her nods to many (if not all) of her past works in this one story.

17. Before Breakfast

A gentleman who's worked hard for everything he has escapes to his cabin on an island for a vacation. His mail isn't forwarded, his family doesn't know where he goes. He looks forward to and revels in the loneliness. Disappointment washes over him as he finds a geologist on his island doing scientific work.

The last 2 stories are in a section titled, 'Five Stories.'

18. The Enchanted Bluff

It's the end of summer and six boys in a small Midwestern town sleep under the stars. They discuss places they'd like to go and one boy tells about a bluff in New Mexico. They each decide it's where they'd like to go the most. The story continues years later and we find that none of the boys made it to that bluff.

19. Tom Outland's Story

A section from her book *The Professor's House*, it's Outland's story on how/why he was sidetracked on his way to college.

Kristine says

This book of short stories was very interesting and written by one of my FAVORITE authors. I have yet to read something by Willa Cather that I don't love. The 15 stories are very character-driven and many of them took place at the turn of the century. I had to take it back to the library before reading the final 3 stories, and keep meaning to check it out again. My favorite story was Flavia and her Artists and the one about the Czech immigrant.

Gale says

FIVE STORIES by WILLA CATHER

"How does the Iconoclast Fit In?"

This quaint collection of five stories proves vintage Cather in literary microcosm. Two tales are set in one of her preferred milieus: the American southwest. In "The Enchanted Bluff" the narrator is increasingly obsessed with the ghosts of a vanished Native American civilization. Is the Narrator a budding anthropologist or just using a long-dead culture as an excuse to turn his back on the world? Is there truly more peace to be found in ancient ruins? Or is he naively deluding himself into believing that he can find himself among ancient ruins?

"Tom Outland's Story" #2 continues the plunge into mystique of the cliff dweller. Five times as long as #1 this story has the protagonist team up with an older man to explore the mesa (tableland terrain) which gradually begins to have an effect on the cabin-bound cowboys. Tom is obsessed with the mesa--before he reaches the ancient ruins and even afterwards. Can overzealous study of the Past impinge upon the reality and the validity of the equally-valid Present?

"Neighbor Rosicky" #3 returns readers to the Midwest setting with which Cather is innately associated. The very last name of the protagonist evokes a Bohemian background. This time the culture clash is firmly rooted in the present, yet the immigrant is torn between his productive life on the plains and the dazzling but impersonal sights in New York City. In this story of average length Cather comments on the importance of a man's hand as a lesson for life, as well as the value of having a woman who possesses sweetness of heart.

"The Best Years" #4 in this anthology represents Cather's last completed short story, though it is not last here. Old Ferg is an idealist who just does not fit in on Christmas Eve. Again in one of her tales there is a great lapse of time: Miss Knightly returns 20 years after the blizzard. Themes include a discussion of which are truly the Best Years in one's life and the meaning of family loyalty.

"Paul's Case" #5 concerns a young man who is universally disliked by his teachers. Having to lie to his father about how he spends Sunday nights Paul seeks release in music. When sudden affluence permits him a trip to NY City he discovers that he feels safe in operatic surroundings. But he and his father hold vastly different views re money--thus he brings along his revolver—not so much for protection...

A good introduction to the style of one of America's foremost female novelists.

(January 23, 2014)
